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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI JEWISH COMMUNITY SEES EXPO AS A WAY TO EXPAND
RECOGNITION

REF: A. A) SHANGHAI 17 (EXPAT MORMONS IN SHANGHAI)
B) 09 SHANGHAI 162 (SHANGHAI'S JEWISH COMMUNITY)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Shanghai's Jewish community has seen slow-but-observable progress toward greater acceptance by local government authorities over the last decade. The community now seeks to take advantage of the six-month-long Shanghai World Expo to push the door open another few inches. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Consul General met January 21 with Rabbi Shalom D. Greenberg, a leader in Shanghai's Jewish community, to discuss efforts to gain more use of the historic Ohel Rachel Synagogue. Rabbi Greenberg and Israeli Consul General Jackie Eldan both credit the U.S. Consulate with helping obtain permission to use the synagogue for religious services, albeit on a limited basis, starting ten years ago. The Rabbi and Israeli Consulate are now asking city authorities for use of the synagogue on Friday and Saturday nights during the May 1-October 31 duration of the Expo, arguing that foreign visitors to the World's Fair will expect to be able to attend religious services while in Shanghai.

WARTIME REFUGEE HAVEN

¶3. (SBU) In the early part of the 20th century, Shanghai's Jewish community grew to 30,000 as Jews fled Central Europe (Ref B). Two synagogues from that era, Ohel Moshe and Ohel Rachel, have been preserved, although not as officially recognized places of worship. (Note: According to Rabbi Greenberg, there are approximately 2,000 expatriate Jews in Shanghai today; he estimates 500 are U.S. citizens, 400-500 are Israeli citizens, and 150 are French citizens. There are no Chinese citizen Jews to speak of. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) Ohel Moshe Synagogue, located in the Hongkou district that housed thousands of Jewish refugees during World War II, is now a museum, restored with help from the United States Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad and the Government of Israel. A plaque dedicated in 2008

commemorates the 1938-1940 actions of Chinese Consul General in Vienna Ho Feng-shan, who facilitated the safe passage of 3,000 Austrian Jews to Shanghai. Many of these refugees, including former Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal, later moved to the United States.

OHEL RACHEL SYNAGOGUE

¶15. (SBU) The Ohel Rachel Synagogue, built in 1921, was renovated by the city government in 1998 for the visit of then-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Later added to the World Monuments Fund's preservation "Watch List", the synagogue is located in a complex used by the Shanghai Education Bureau and not usually accessible to outside visitors.

¶16. (SBU) Since 1999, Shanghai authorities have allowed access to Ohel Rachel by the Jewish community three times a year. While refusing use during the High Holidays, the government agreed to Hanukkah, Purim, and the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Day. Although for the past ten years this access was granted on the basis of an annual joint request signed by the U.S. and Israeli Consuls General (Ref B), the situation has now become routine enough that Rabbi Greenberg said a letter is no longer necessary. Hoping to advance the situation a step further, the

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Rabbi is now seeking regular routine access to the Ohel Rachel Synagogue and permission to restore the building and surroundings as a center for Jewish life in Shanghai. The Shanghai Government has so far refused to allow the Jewish community to make upgrades to the building, which lacks air conditioning and heating.

JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER

¶17. (SBU) Another sign of progress flagged by Rabbi Greenberg was the inclusion of a photo of the unofficial Jewish Community Center in a 2005 publication on "The Jews in Shanghai". The caption identifying the center (a house in the western suburbs) is seen by Rabbi Greenberg as de facto recognition of Jewish religious activity in Shanghai. Equally notable, the Public Security Bureau (PSB) has shown a willingness to turn a blind eye to the 80-150 foreigners who gather at the center every Friday evening. Rabbi Greenberg described a conversation with a PSB official who insisted that the occasion involves only 40-50 people, while acknowledging that additional "uninvited" guests also show up. This helpful fiction allows the Friday gatherings to operate without the permit required for gatherings of more than 50 people.

WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPO VISITORS

¶18. (SBU) Noting that he has already received inquiries about religious services from future visitors to the Shanghai 2010 World Expo, Rabbi Greenberg submitted a request to the Shanghai

Foreign Affairs Office in November 2009 to use Ohel Rachel on Friday and Saturday evenings throughout the entire May-October Expo period. To support this effort, Rabbi Greenberg is requesting that local diplomats and visiting dignitaries mention the Ohel Rachel Synagogue in their meetings with city officials. He hopes this will lead the city government to realize the importance of allowing foreign visitors to attend services at the synagogue.

¶9. (SBU) Rabbi Greenberg also requested that the U.S. Consulate consider adding a visit to Ohel Rachel to the itineraries of future CODELS and other visitors to raise awareness. He noted that Israeli President Simon Peres will visit the synagogue when he comes to the Expo in early May.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Despite the fact that Judaism is not one of the five religions officially recognized by the Chinese government, the Shanghai authorities allow low-key religious activities, as long as mainly foreigners are involved. At least some local officials recognize that Shanghai's war-time role as a haven for Jewish refugees is a source of great good will; the bilingual publication "The Jews in Shanghai" devotes 135 pages to text and pictures illustrating the city's long Jewish heritage. This recognition, combined with a desire to showcase Shanghai during the Expo, may lead to greater accommodation for the foreign Jewish community and the Ohel Rachel Synagogue. Coupled with the recent Shanghai issuance of a permit allowing foreign Mormons to hold weekly services (Ref A), municipal approval for regular Jewish worship would be another step toward easing restrictions on religious observances in Shanghai. As the city

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faces the glare of the Expo spotlight and a surge of visitors, some officials are showing awareness that the right to worship in one's own faith is part of what many foreigners expect from a world class city.

CAMP